

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation, Teacher's Guide

Week 3: Faith in Jesus Christ

John 3:16–18; Hebrews 11:1–6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson defines the very thing the whole study turns on: saving faith. What is at stake doctrinally is enormous, because two opposite errors crowd in on this single word. On one side stands bare mental assent, the notion that to “believe in Jesus” means only to agree that He is real or that the gospel facts are true. On the other side stands faith-only-ism, which rightly insists that we are saved by faith but then strips faith of the obedient response Scripture always attaches to it. Your task is to present the faith of the New Testament: a living, trusting reliance on Jesus as the Son of God, a faith that, precisely because it is alive, expresses itself in repentance, confession, and baptism. John gives us faith's object (the only Son, given in love); Hebrews gives us faith's nature (assurance and conviction that acts).

Handle this text with particular care, because John 3:16 is the most quoted and most misused verse in the Bible. Many in our culture hear “whoever believes” as “whoever sincerely agrees,” and conclude that nothing further is asked. But John's own Gospel will not allow this. The believing John commends is one that “comes to” Christ, “abides in” His word, and “obeys” the Son (John 3:36, where many translations render the contrast to belief as “does not obey”). Do not set faith against obedience; rather, show that obedience is faith breathing. And do not let the lesson drift into earning. The point is not that we add works to faith to be saved, but that the faith which saves is by its nature a living, obeying trust.

At the same time, keep this warm and personal. Behind the doctrine is a face: a God who “so loved” that He “gave.” The aim is not merely that students define faith correctly but that they actually entrust themselves to Christ more fully. Many sitting in the room have a head full of facts and a heart that has never fully leaned its weight on Jesus. Lead them, gently, from believing about Him to believing in Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

In John 3:16 Jesus promises eternal life to “whoever believes in him.” Looking at the way Jesus speaks of believing here and throughout John's Gospel, what does it mean to “believe in” Him, and why is this far more than simply agreeing that He existed or that His teaching is good?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with the grammar of faith in John. John repeatedly uses a construction best rendered “believe into” Jesus, a movement of the whole self toward and onto Christ. It is relational and

directional, not merely intellectual. To believe in Him is to entrust oneself to Him as Savior and Lord.

Show how John's Gospel itself defines this believing. Those who truly believe "receive" Him (1:12), "come to" Him (6:35), and "abide" in His word (8:31). John 3:36 sets the sharpest contrast of all: the one who believes the Son has eternal life, but the one who "does not obey" the Son will not see life. John can treat unbelief and disobedience as the same refusal, which tells us belief and obedience are two sides of one coin.

Contrast this with the impoverished modern sense of "belief" as private opinion. To say "I believe in Jesus" the way one says "I believe in myself" or "I believe it will be a nice day" is to empty the word of its biblical weight. Saving faith stakes a life on its object.

Keep Christ central. The point of faith is not the strength of our believing but the trustworthiness of the One believed. Weak faith in a strong Savior saves; strong confidence in anything else does not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Johannine "believe into" Christ: relational, directional trust, not bare assent
- John's own synonyms for faith: receive, come to, abide in His word (1:12; 6:35; 8:31)
- John 3:36 equating unbelief with disobedience to the Son
- The modern reduction of "belief" to private opinion
- Faith's power lies in its object, Christ, not in its own intensity

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between believing that Jesus existed and believing in Him?
- How does John 3:36 help us see the link between faith and obedience?
- Why is it freeing that faith rests on Christ's trustworthiness rather than our own strength?

Question 2

Student Question:

There is often a gap between the faith we profess and the trust we actually live by. In what specific area of your life are you still carrying the weight yourself rather than entrusting it to Jesus? What would it look like to actually lean your whole weight on Him there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question exposes the gap between professed and practiced faith. Almost everyone affirms trust in Jesus in the abstract while quietly carrying certain burdens entirely on their own. Help students locate the specific area.

Name common examples without scolding: finances, a wayward child, a health crisis, the future, our reputation. We say we trust God and then lie awake managing the universe ourselves. Trust is not the absence of effort, but it is the absence of the frantic, faithless grip.

Move toward a concrete act of entrusting. To lean our weight on Christ in a specific area might mean a particular prayer of surrender, a decision to obey rather than control, or bringing the burden into the light with a brother or sister. Faith grows by being exercised in real places.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between professed faith and lived trust
- Identifying the specific burden we still carry alone
- Trust as the absence of the faithless grip, not the absence of effort
- Entrusting as a concrete, exercised act

Discussion Prompts

- What is one burden you say you trust God with but still carry alone?
- How can you tell the difference between faithful effort and faithless control?
- What would a concrete act of entrusting look like for you this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus says the one who believes “is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already” (v. 18). Why does Jesus speak of condemnation as a present reality and not only a future verdict, and what does this teach us about why faith in the Son is so urgent?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Unfold the present tense of condemnation in verse 18. Jesus does not say the unbeliever will be condemned someday; he is “condemned already.” Apart from Christ, a person is not in neutral territory awaiting trial; they are already under the verdict, because of sin (recall Week 1).

Explain the dividing line. The issue is not the comparative goodness of people but their relationship to the Son. The light has come into the world; condemnation is the settled state of those who refuse it. This is why faith is urgent and not optional, a rescue from a present danger, not insurance against a distant one.

Guard the balance of the text. Verse 17 insists Jesus came “not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” God’s posture is rescue, not eagerness to condemn. The condemnation that remains is the tragic result of refusing the rescue, not the purpose for which Christ came.

Tie urgency to love. The same passage that speaks of present condemnation begins with “God so loved.” Urgency and love are not opposites here; it is precisely because the danger is real and present that the love that rescues is so staggering.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Condemnation as a present reality apart from Christ, not only a future verdict
- The dividing line: one’s relationship to the Son, not comparative goodness
- Christ’s purpose as rescue, not condemnation (v. 17)
- Faith as escape from a present danger, lending real urgency
- Love and urgency held together

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus speak of condemnation as something already true, not just future?
- How does verse 17 keep us from picturing God as eager to condemn?
- How does the reality of present condemnation make God’s love more, not less, amazing?

Question 4

Student Question:

Many believers live under a low, nagging sense of condemnation even after coming to Christ. Where do you most often feel that weight, and how does the promise that the one who believes “is not condemned” speak directly into that place in your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question pastors the believer who still lives under condemnation. Many Christians intellectually affirm forgiveness while emotionally carrying guilt and a sense of never measuring up. Speak tenderly here.

Distinguish two things carefully. Healthy conviction from the Spirit leads us to repentance and then to peace; the heavy, vague, accusing weight that lingers after repentance is not from God. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Help students learn to recognize the difference.

Apply the promise directly. “Whoever believes in him is not condemned.” For the one truly trusting Christ, the verdict has already been rendered, and it is acquittal. Invite students to preach this promise to themselves in the exact place they feel the weight.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between Spirit-given conviction and lingering false condemnation
- No condemnation for those in Christ (Romans 8:1)
- Living from the verdict of acquittal already given

- Preaching the promise to oneself in the place of guilt

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most often feel a weight of condemnation, and is it from God or not?
- How can you tell healthy conviction from destructive, lingering guilt?
- What would change if you truly believed there is no condemnation for you in Christ?

Question 5

Student Question:

Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” How does this definition reshape our common idea of faith as a blind leap or wishful thinking, and what is faith actually anchored to according to this verse?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open Hebrews 11:1 carefully. Faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The two key words convey certainty and reality, not vagueness. Faith gives present substance to future promises and present proof to unseen realities.

Correct the caricature of faith as a blind leap. Biblical faith is not believing without evidence or against the evidence; it is trusting the word of a God who has proven trustworthy. It is reasonable reliance on a reliable Person, not a gamble in the dark.

Anchor faith to its object. Verse 3 grounds faith in the God who created by His word, and verse 6 in the God who “exists” and “rewards those who seek him.” Faith is only as good as its object, and this object is the eternal, faithful God. The assurance is borrowed from His reliability.

Connect to daily life. Because faith deals in unseen certainties, it lets us live now in light of what is not yet visible: the resurrection, the inheritance, the presence of God. This is the engine of Christian endurance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as assurance and conviction, conveying certainty and reality
- Correcting the caricature of faith as a blind, evidence-free leap
- Faith anchored to the trustworthy God who creates and rewards (vv. 3, 6)
- Living now in light of unseen, future certainties
- Faith as the engine of endurance

Discussion Prompts

- How does Hebrews 11:1 challenge the idea that faith is wishful thinking?
- What is the difference between a blind leap and trusting a proven God?

- How does faith in unseen realities change the way we live today?

Question 6

Student Question:

We are surrounded by a culture that says “seeing is believing.” Where in your life right now are you tempted to live only by what you can see, measure, and control, rather than by trust in the unseen God and His promises? What would walking by faith look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the “things not seen” into daily life. We live in a culture catechized to believe only what can be measured, monetized, or photographed. Help students see how deeply this shapes them.

Name the arenas where sight competes with faith: financial security we can count, approval we can hear, outcomes we can control. Walking by faith does not despise these things; it refuses to let them become the only realities we live for.

Aim at one concrete area. Where is God asking a student to obey, give, forgive, or wait based on an unseen promise rather than a visible guarantee? Faith becomes real precisely at the point where sight runs out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cultural creed that “seeing is believing”
- The arenas where sight competes with faith (security, approval, control)
- Walking by faith without despising visible things (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- Faith exercised where sight runs out

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to live only by what you can see and control?
- What unseen promise of God is hardest for you to live by right now?
- Where is sight running out, calling you to walk by faith instead?

Question 7

Student Question:

Hebrews 11 never simply says these people believed; it says “by faith Abel offered,” “by faith Noah constructed,” “by faith Abraham obeyed.” What do these examples teach us about the relationship between genuine faith and action, and why is a faith that produces nothing not the faith the Bible commends?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question begins to gather the central truth of the lesson. Read the refrain of Hebrews 11 aloud: “by faith” someone did something. Faith here is never inert. Abel offered, Noah built, Abraham went, Moses chose. The chapter is a gallery of faith in action.

Make the logic explicit. Hebrews does not say these people had faith and also happened to obey, as if the two were separate. Their obedience was the visible shape of their faith. Noah’s faith looked like an ark; Abraham’s faith looked like a journey. Take away the action and you cannot see that any faith was there at all.

Apply the principle. A faith that produces nothing is not a humble, quiet faith; according to James it is a dead faith (James 2:17). The issue is not whether our works are impressive but whether our faith is alive enough to move us at all.

Set up the heavy question to come. This prepares students to see why saving faith naturally moves toward the obedient responses of repentance, confession, and baptism. Faith that will build an ark will certainly be baptized.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as action throughout Hebrews 11: Abel offered, Noah built, Abraham went
- Obedience as the visible shape of faith, not a separate addition
- A fruitless faith as a dead faith (James 2:17)
- The bridge from living faith to the obedient gospel response

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Hebrews describe faith by what people did, not only what they thought?
- What does it mean that obedience is faith made visible?
- Can a faith that never moves us to do anything be a living faith? Why or why not?

Question 8

Student Question:

If faith always expresses itself in action, then there is probably some step of obedience God is calling you toward that you have not yet taken. What is it? What is the “ark” He is asking you to build, or the place He is asking you to go, that will require you to act before you can see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the gallery of faith toward the student. If faith acts, then there is likely a specific, postponed step of obedience in each life. Press for the particular, not the general.

Use the passage's own images. What is the "ark" God has asked this person to build before the rain comes, the act that will look foolish until it is vindicated? Where is the "land" He has called them to leave without knowing the outcome?

Address the cost of acting before seeing. Faith almost always requires us to move before the results are visible: to forgive before we feel like it, to give before we see the return, to obey before we understand. Encourage one concrete step of obedient faith this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as a specific, postponed step of obedience
- Building the "ark" before the rain; leaving the "land" without seeing
- The cost of acting before results are visible
- One concrete step of obedient faith

Discussion Prompts

- What "ark" is God asking you to build right now?
- What step of obedience are you postponing until you can see the outcome?
- What is one concrete act of faith you could take this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Scripture says even the demons believe that God exists and shudder (James 2:19), yet they are not saved, while Hebrews says "without faith it is impossible to please him" (11:6). Putting these together, how would you describe the difference between a dead faith that merely agrees and a living, saving faith? And how does that living faith naturally lead a person to repent, confess Jesus as Lord, and be baptized into Him, rather than stopping at belief alone?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and the doctrinal hinge of the lesson. Set the two texts side by side: James 2:19 (the demons believe and shudder) and Hebrews 11:6 (without faith it is impossible to please God). Together they force a precise definition of saving faith.

Define dead faith first. The demons have flawless theology; their belief is correct and even fearful, yet it saves no one because it is mere assent without trust, love, or submission. A person can affirm every word of the creed and still possess only the faith of demons.

Now define living faith. Saving faith includes the mind (it agrees the gospel is true), the heart (it trusts and treasures Christ), and the will (it surrenders to Him as Lord). It is the faith of Hebrews 11, which obeys and acts. This is what Scripture means by "the obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5).

Now make the crucial connection the question asks for. Because saving faith is a living, surrendering trust, it does not and cannot stop at belief alone. The same faith that lays hold of Christ will turn from sin (repentance), own Him before others (confession), and be united with Him in baptism. These are not works added to faith to earn salvation; they are the very motions of a living faith receiving the gift. To stop at “belief only” is to settle for a faith the Bible never promises to save (James 2:24, the only verse in Scripture that uses the phrase “faith alone,” and it does so to deny that such faith justifies).

Steer between the ditches as you close. Do not let anyone hear that we earn salvation by these responses; grace remains the ground and the gift. But do not let anyone hear that bare belief is enough; that is the very error James writes to demolish. Living faith and obedient response are not rivals; they are one reality.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Dead faith as mere assent: the demons believe and shudder (James 2:19)
- Living faith engaging mind, heart, and will: trust and surrender, not just agreement
- The obedience of faith (Romans 1:5) and faith made complete by works (James 2:22)
- James 2:24: the one place Scripture uses “faith alone,” and it denies that it justifies
- Why living faith naturally moves to repentance, confession, and baptism
- Avoiding both faith-only-ism and works-righteousness: response receives the gift, it does not earn it

Discussion Prompts

- How can the demons believe correctly and still be lost?
- How would you describe, in your own words, the difference between dead and living faith?
- Why does a truly living faith move toward repentance, confession, and baptism rather than stopping at belief?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages, the love of God who gave His Son and the long line of people who lived by faith. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to move from believing about Him to truly trusting in Him this week. What is the next concrete step your faith is asking you to take?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone calls for movement from believing about Christ to trusting in Him. Gather both passages: the God who gave His Son in love, and the saints who lived their faith out loud. Ask each student for one specific next step.

Discern where people are. For some the step is deeper surrender of a guarded area; for others it is an act of obedience long postponed; for some it is the first real entrusting of themselves to Christ, which will lead toward repentance, confession, and baptism in the weeks ahead. Hold all of these open warmly.

Keep the focus on the Person. The goal is not stronger faith in the abstract but a fuller leaning on Jesus Himself. End by reminding the class that the One who asks for their trust is the One who so loved them that He gave Himself for them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from belief about Christ to trust in Christ
- Discerning each student's next step, including first faith for the seeker
- The seed of repentance, confession, and baptism for the not-yet-obedient
- Faith fixed on the Person of Jesus, not on faith itself

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way you can lean more of your weight on Jesus this week?
- Is there a step of obedience your faith has been pointing you toward?
- If you have never truly entrusted yourself to Christ, what would help you take that step?